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Press Release

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A major hurricane, a nuclear accident, and a nuclear detonation (all simulated, all occurring in Texas) are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg facing U.S. Northern Command forces during exercise 'Unified Defense' 04.

The simulated events also include aircraft hijackings, threats from a fictitious country testing its strategic capabilities, and attacks on maritime and port security events by a group of domestic terrorists in Alaska.

Though the attacks are all simulated, the responses are real world, said Army Lt. Col. Tim Croft, a USNORTHCOM exercise planner. He said some 50 different local, state and federal agencies in Texas, Alaska, Virginia, Colorado, and Washington D.C. are participating in the Feb. 19–25 exercise. The exercise is testing homeland defense and homeland security efforts along with USNORTHCOM's ability to provide military assistance to civil authorities.

North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is also participating in the exercise in a scenario that poses aerospace defense challenges, according to Air Force Lt. Col. Rob Peterson, a NORAD exercise planner.

In announcing the exercise Feb. 17, Texas Governor Rick Perry said he 'hopes and prays' that his state never faces a real disaster like the one simulated. 'But if these kinds of catastrophic events do occur, officials need to be prepared to respond,' said Perry.

Although exercise participants were briefed in advance about the scenarios, they were not told every detail. For example, participants must determine if the nuclear incidents in Texas are the result of terrorist attacks or an accident, Croft said. The simulated hurricane is providing cover and diversion for a terrorist attack.

Kathy Walt, a spokeswoman for Perry's office who attended a pre-exercise briefing in Texas, said one of the questions facing homeland defense is 'would terrorists look for natural disasters that are likely to occur and then try to time an event to coincide with a community or state responding to a natural disaster?'

The nuclear detonation scenario simulated killing 300 and affecting nearly 1,000 residents in a town of only 3,700 people. According to Croft, this is the first time the Department of Homeland Security and USNORTHCOM have included a nuclear detonation in an exercise.

Since most exercise activities are being simulated, residents in the exercise areas will not see troop movements, hear flying aircraft, or see and hear emergency vehicles responding to accident sites. The one exception will be in Alaska where Coast Guard vessels actually will be visible in the water. But there won't be 'any big bangs or anything like that,' said Coast Guard Lt. Brad Wilson. He said the general public would see little activity.

Military and state disaster preparedness planners spent almost a year planning the \$1.5 million exercise in which Texas and Alaska officials asked to be included, said Croft. He said the states wanted to test their emergency management functions.

Rod Swope, city manager for Juneau, Alaska, told local news reporters that he expects his state to learn a lot from the exercise. 'In the event something happens (in the future), we'll be prepared,' said Swope.

In addition to determining how federal, state and local agencies will react to simultaneous

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emergencies, "Unified Defense '04" also will allow USNORTHCOM forces to get to know the people and improve our success rate if there should be a real-world event," said Mike Perini, NORAD and USNORTHCOM public affairs director. Perini said if it were possible, the command would conduct similar exercises in all U.S. states and territories.